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The Council on Foreign Relations

Is It a Club? Seminar?

'Invisible Government'

ON March 26, 1969, eleven places were set for lunch at the oval table in the Council on Foreign Relations' stately meeting room overlooking Park Avenue. The guest list was not quite so distinguished as some from the past, judging by the photographs hanging on the black walnut paneling: Harold Macmillan chatting with Henry Wriston; John Foster Dulles wedged stiffly between John J. McCloy and Averell Harriman; John W. Davis towering over the King of Siam. But for a weekday working lunch, it was an impressive assemblage.

There was Cyrus Vance, recently returned deputy negotiator at the Paris peace talks; Robert Roosa, former Under Secretary of the Treasury; Chester Cooper, former special assistant to Harriman; James Grant, former assistant administrator for Vietnam in the Agency for International Development; Roy Wehrle, former deputy assistant AID administrator for Vietnam; Paul Warnecke, former Assistant Secretary of Defense; Robert Bowie, director of Harvard's Center for International Affairs; Samuel Huntington, professor of government at Harvard; Lucian Pye, professor of political science at M.I.T., and Harry Boardman and David MacEachron, Council staff members.

The lunchers all knew each other. Most had worked together in Government; all except Wehrle were Council members. So they wasted little time on small talk over the soup, plunging right into their subject: an effort to devise a formula that might break the deadlock in Paris. The suggestion that the Council might help evolve such a formula had come from Harriman. Although the Council's staff rejected any formal role, it permitted Boardman to invite appropriate members to a lunch at which the matter might be discussed.

Over the next five weeks, the group met several times at the Council's headquarters at 58 East

68th Street, at the Center for International Affairs in Cambridge and the Cosmos Club in Washington. From its deliberations grew a proposal endorsed by eight members. It envisioned a standstill cease-fire and a division of power based on a recognition of territory controlled by the Saigon Government and the Vietcong—a formula the framers conceded was "rigged" to favor the Government.

In May, the remaining participants met for dinner at the Cosmos Club with Elliott Richardson, then Under Secretary of State, and Henry Kissinger, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (and the Council's most influential member). A participant recalls: "Elliott seemed interested; Henry obviously wasn't, and it's Henry who counts." An official says: "The proposal was received with all the pomp and circumstance accorded a communication from a foreign government, then filed and largely forgotten."

But apparently not completely forgotten. At Richardson's request, Boardman, Cooper, Huntington and Wehrle submitted further elaborations. Vance continued to push the concept with his many influential friends in Washington. For 18 months there was no sign of acceptance. But when President Nixon announced a five-point peace initiative on Oct. 7, 1970, it included the first American call for a standstill cease-fire as a prelude to a political settlement based on "the existing relationship of political forces in South Vietnam." Although many aspects of the Council group's plan were clearly absent, the concepts bore sufficient similarity that a year later Cyrus Vance could say, "I think we had some influence."

THE "peace initiative," although in some respects unusual, illustrates the intricate fashion in which the powerful men who make up the Council still influence the development of American foreign policy.

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that it does—then it is the influence its members bring to bear through such channels.

In an age when most traditional institutions are being challenged, the network of influence the Council symbolizes is increasingly coming under attack. Critics, within and without, are asking whether America can any longer afford such a cozy, clubby approach to the making of foreign policy. In recent months, the attack has focused on the appointment of William Bundy — a leading member of the "club," but also a prime implementer of a discredited Vietnam policy—as editor of the Council's journal, *Foreign Affairs*. But the challenge goes well beyond the Bundy appointment. And, ironically, as the Council's leadership moves to head it off by admitting younger, dissident members, it only intensifies the internal debate. In months to come, the organization that has coolly analyzed power struggles in the Kremlin and Leopoldville may face an increasingly bitter struggle of its own.

ONE of the most remarkable aspects of this remarkable organiza-

J. ANTHONY LUKAS, a staff writer for this magazine, is the author of "Don't Shoot: The New York City Police and the

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